



# Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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JULY 8, 2018

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Do As I Say . . . Do As I Do  
Mark 6:1-13; II Corinthians 12:2-10

Sometimes things don't go exactly as you had hoped or planned. If you have ever watched the movie *Hitch* which stars Will Smith as a consultant who helps other men get a chance at love and relationships by getting past themselves, you know that he is not all that good at relationships himself. When a particular young woman catches his eye, he sets out to impress her. He invites her on a day of jet skiing the Hudson River in New York. Unfortunately, his jet ski dies and while he is climbing on the back of her machine, he kicks her in the head and knocks her into the water. Not a good start to a date.

They make their way to their destination which is Ellis Island. The security guard, a friend of Hitch, has set up one of the registration books and turned it to a particular page. As the young woman looks at the book she gasps, points to the page, and says, "That's my great-great-grandfather. That's his signature." Hitch and his buddy exchange smiles, knowing that their plan is working. As the woman becomes more emotional, she hisses and grimaces and runs outside. Clearly taken by surprise at this turn of events, Hitch turns to his friend and says, "I saw that going differently in my mind." It turns out that her great-great-grandfather was "the Butcher of Cádiz," which, instead of being a profession, was actually a headline! Sometimes things don't go the way you want them to!

Jesus likely had something of a similar moment when he returned home after a very busy and successful tour of preaching, teaching, and healing. On the sabbath, he went to the synagogue in which he had grown up, and here is what happened:

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters

here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Mark 6:1-6a

I imagine that when Jesus reached the road leading out of his hometown, he said to his friends, “You know, I saw that going differently in my mind.”

Sometimes things don't go exactly as you had hoped or planned. We are familiar with some people who failed before their desires were finally fulfilled. Thomas Edison could not handle public school because he was restless and distracted. Teachers thought he was incapable of learning so his mother taught him at home. One of his favorite comments about creating the lightbulb was: “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that do not work.”<sup>1</sup> Michael Jordan, considered by many people to be the greatest basketball player ever, did not make his high school varsity team at first, losing his spot to his taller friend. Instead, he worked hard, honed his skills, and made his mark playing on the JV team. Beethoven struggled with his music at an early age and many of his teachers gave up on him, but his father did not. Despite becoming deaf, Beethoven wrote some of the world's most beautiful music. J.K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* books, had her first manuscript rejected a dozen or more times before the daughter of a publishing CEO begged her father to publish it.<sup>2</sup>

Failing or otherwise not having things go the way we want is part of life. In fact, it is a large part of life, but one we do not necessarily handle well. Over the past few years, Smith College in Massachusetts has initiated a program called “Failing Well” in an attempt to help young people, for whom failure is not generally in their vocabulary, cope with the disappointing events of life. The purpose is to help students recognize that they will not always get it right or do things the way they want or necessarily succeed according to societal standards, but always they will have an opportunity to learn from those experiences and grow as a result.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Edison as cited by Nick Horton, “Failing Forward: 7 Stories of Success Through Failure,” *Breaking Muscle*; available online at: <https://breakingmuscle.com/fitness/failing-forward-7-stories-of-success-through-failure>.

<sup>2</sup>These and other examples of “successful failures” are cited by Nick Horton.

<sup>3</sup>Jessica Bennett, “On Campus, Failure Is on the Syllabus,” *The New York Times* (June 24, 2017); available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/24/fashion/fear-of-failure.html>.

Nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus included this very lesson in his syllabus for training disciples. We discover earlier in Mark's Gospel that Jesus went up on a mountain and called twelve of his followers to be his disciples and to take up his ministry (Mark 3:13-19). As he traveled the region of Galilee, he had them listen and watch and learn from him. They heard him tell clever stories, offer insight into the law and prophets, and turn the tables on his severest critics. They watched him heal people and saw the ways in which he welcomed folks they never would have given the time of day. They learned what the kingdom of God is all about and struggled with lessons on fulfilling the commandments of God. They discovered who their neighbor really was. By all accounts, their internship with Jesus was quite successful, but they needed one lesson more. That lesson is the one they received in Nazareth where things did not go as Jesus had hoped.<sup>4</sup>

Rejection is never easy, but being snubbed by one's life-long friends and neighbors would be more than most of us could bear. Surely this kind of treatment was not what Jesus signed up for! He had come to show us who God is and what God will do. He was the Savior of the world, but in his hometown, he was just "the carpenter, the son of Mary" which, by the way, was not the compliment we think it was. In that time, men were generally recognized by their father, not their mother, so referring to him as "the son of Mary" was another subtle dig at this upstart who had come back home to peddle his wares. What was Jesus to do? How would you react after such an "epic fail"? Listen to what Jesus did:

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Mark 6:6b-13

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<sup>4</sup>Moffett Churn, "Reflections on the Lectionary: July 8, 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time," *The Christian Century* (June 20, 2018), 20. Rev. Churn describes Jesus' training of the disciples as a series of courses leading to graduation.

In reaction to what happened in Nazareth, Jesus kept doing what he set out to do and he sent the disciples to do what they had been called to do. Jesus gave them further advice. He told them to travel light and to depend upon God to provide what they would need: food, lodging, clothes. Even more important, he prepared them for failure—or at least rejection. “If they do not receive you and won’t listen to you,” he said, “keep moving. Shake the dust off your feet and go onto the next town.” Whether any of the disciples had to implement this lesson in any of the little villages dotting the mountains of Galilee, we don’t know. We do know that they accomplished their mission by proclaiming the gospel, healing people, and casting out demons. They may have discovered any number of ways how not to accomplish these goals, but they certainly learned how to do them well.

Jesus taught his disciples about the kingdom of God and he showed them what it is like. He told them to do as he said and to do as he did. Not everyone accepted him or his teachings. Not everyone responded to him in faith. Eventually, a lot of people wanted him killed, and he was. The crucifixion is, from one angle, God’s greatest failure. At sundown on that day of Passover, most of Jesus’ own disciples thought it was all over. Jesus had failed and so had they. God’s movement among them was all done.

On that Sunday morning, however, when dawn shattered the darkness and bird songs greeted a new day, Jesus climbed out of the tomb, shook the dust of death and defeat off his shoes, and danced with new life in the garden. As the Apostle Paul would later say,

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. I Corinthians 15:54b-58

Paul himself knew quite a bit about rejection, failure, and hardship. He was frequently jailed, beaten, and abused for his ministry. In the passage we heard earlier from his letter to the church at Corinth, in an almost comical way, Paul talks about a deeply personal spiritual experience he had. Making a somewhat feeble attempt not to boast, he writes,

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the

body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations.

II Corinthians 12:2-6

In Paul's opinion, he was given what he called "a thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble. What I think is so important for us, is what Paul says about handling disabling and frustrating circumstances which threaten to hinder us in what we do. In answer to his appeal to remove this "thorn," God said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." In response, Paul rejoiced with his friends,

"So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

II Corinthians 12:9-10

As paradoxical as it seems, this is the Gospel. Whatever hardships, setbacks, failures, or challenges come our way—they do and they will—God can use them as messengers of grace to help us detect our weaknesses so that we can increase our strengths. Just as Jesus did not allow the negative reaction of his hometown friends to hinder him from his mission, so we should not allow the setbacks that come our way to stop us from fulfilling God's call in our lives. He taught his disciples by example that even when things do not go the way you hoped they would, you keep going and you keep following God. This lesson of life is ultimately about trusting God in all things, for God will not be deterred in loving the world into the wholeness for which God created us.

Sometimes things don't go exactly as you had hoped or planned. There are many times when we say, "You know, I saw that going differently in my mind." When that happens, shake the dust off your shoes, learn from what happened, and keep following God on this great adventure we call life. If we allow it, God will turn our weaknesses into our greatest strengths and our failures will become our success. Amen.

July 8, 2018

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

O God who calls us out of our comfortable places, who equips and empowers us by the Holy Spirit, and who sends us out to minister in your name, move among us now, to call us, to empower us, to send us. Transform our hearts and minds that our love for you might run so deep that we would be willing to give of ourselves for the sake of others, in this week and beyond and in this community and beyond. In the tasks that are before us, teach us to rely not on our own abilities but, in humility, to encourage the gifts we find in others and to rely on the strength which comes from you. We give thanks for every opportunity we have to work, to serve, to speak a kind word, to form relationships and, in all things, to demonstrate the love of Christ.

We pray, O Lord, that as we embark on this journey of faith and mission we call Gatekeepers, you would go ahead of us to prepare the way. Open the hearts and minds and lives of the homeowners we will serve that they might receive your touch of mercy and your word of hope through us. Open our hearts and minds as well, that we might be used by you and receive a blessing through our work. Bless your servants who have answered your call to love their neighbors and to take on challenging tasks. Give us the words you would have us to say, the message you would have us to share, and so fill us with your love that it cannot help but overflow to everyone we meet. Strengthen us with the support and prayers of this church family, for which we give you our thanks. And we pray that you would mold and change the life of each one of us, that we might be bold enough to be about your work of compassion and reconciliation wherever or whenever you call us. In the name of the One who came to give us grace and peace for all the journeys of our lives. Amen.

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